

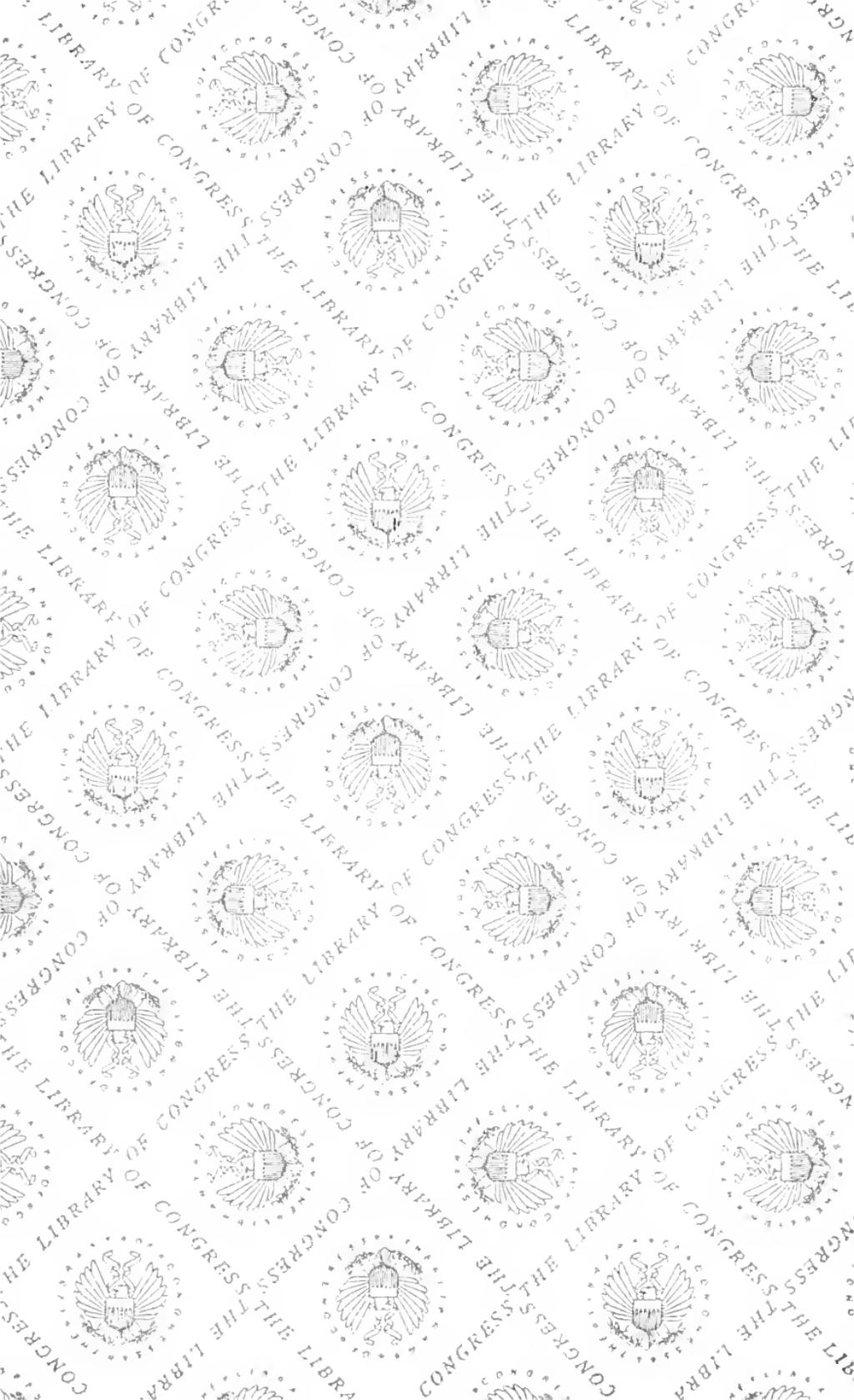
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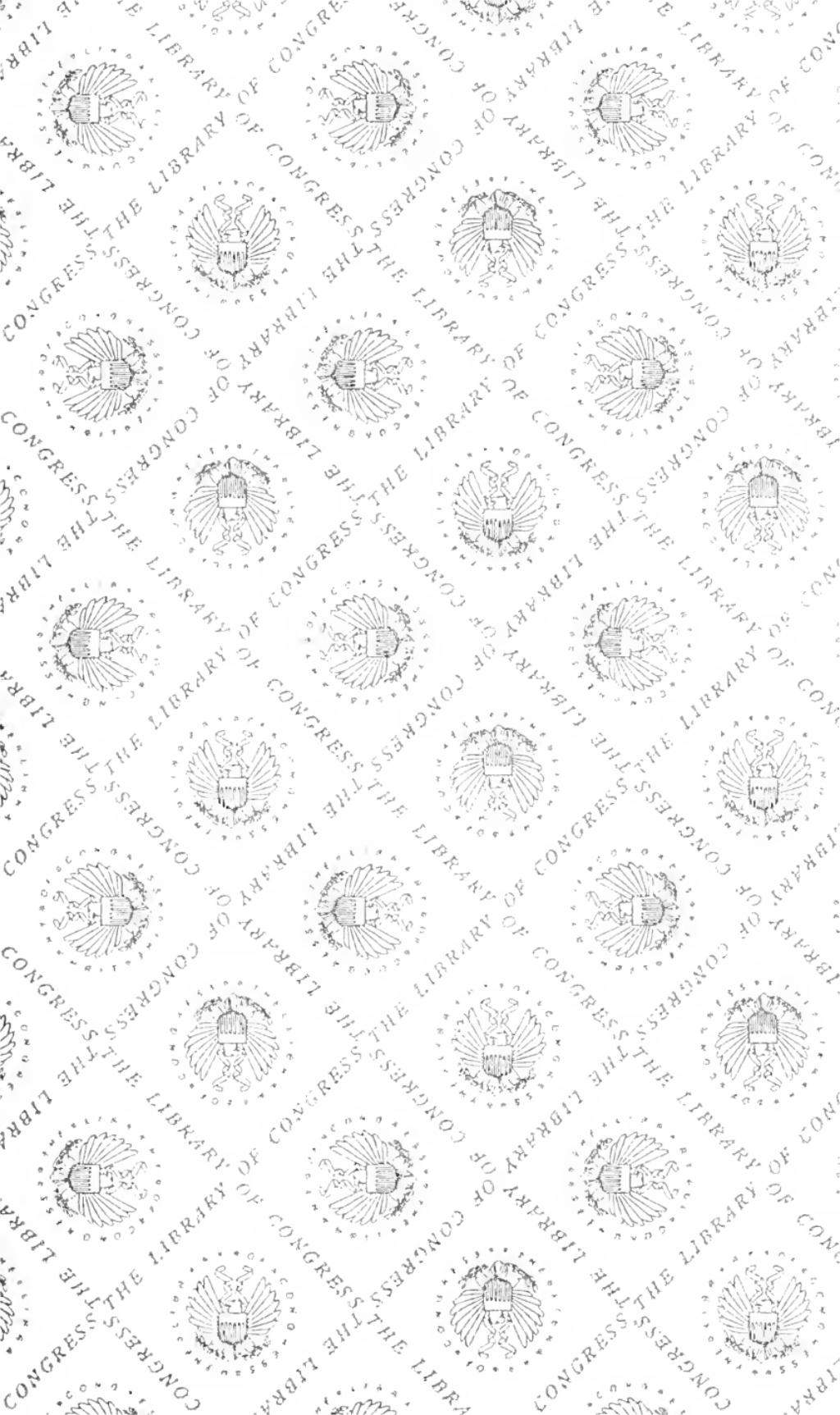
1823

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ORATION  
ON  
THE FORTY-SEVENTH ANNIVERSARY  
OF  
AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE,  
DELIVERED BEFORE  
**The Fire Department**  
OF THE  
**CITY OF NEW-YORK,**

JULY 4, 1823

BY CHARLES P. CLINCH  
A MEMBER.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE COMMITTEE OF ARRANGEMENTS.

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1823.

*Firemen's Hall, July 9th, 1823.*

At a meeting of the Firemen's Committee of Arrangements for celebrating the forty-seventh Anniversary of American Independence,

"Resolved, that a copy of the oration, pronounced by Mr. Charles P. Clinch, before the Firemen of the City of New-York, in the Market-street Church, on the 4th inst., be requested for publication."

Extract from the minutes.

UZZIAH WENMAN, *Chairman.*

NIEL GRAY, *Secretary.*

## ORATION.

FELLOW-CITIZENS—

We have assembled to celebrate the birth-day of our national Independence—to rejoice in the nativity of our country's sovereignty—to exhibit to the world the grateful and proud remembrance in which we hold that auspicious day, when these United States of America assumed, never to relinquish, a name and character, separate and distinct among the nations of the earth:—separate as the eastern and western hemispheres,—distinct as the governing principles of liberty and slavery!

What, fellow-citizens, on this occasion ought to be the feelings of our hearts, and the subject of our mind's contemplation?—How shall we rightly discharge our duty as patriots and freemen on this anniversary of our political birth?

Fellow-citizens! we can only prove that we justly prize the signal interposition of divine Providence, manifested in the happy termination of our revolutionary struggle, by correctly appreciating the rights and privileges we enjoy as members of this republic;—by keeping in the holiest sanctuary of our hearts, the venerated memory, the godlike estimation of our heroic forefathers, those prominent instruments, in the hand of heaven, in effecting the great work of American Independence;—by contrasting our own with the governments and institutions of other nations, cherishing the difference in favour of our superiority, and by lifting our hearts in thankfulness for the full and exceeding measure of peace,

prosperity, and happiness, which has fallen to the lot of our beloved country.

Let us then, fellow-citizens, engage in those contemplations which will teach us to value our national benefits, and awaken our gratitude for the blessings we individually enjoy! Let us pursue that thought, which leads through what we might have been to what we are,—looking back to those emphatic times which tried men's souls,—to the gloomy period of seventeen hundred and seventy-five, when the clouds of oppression which had long darkened the horizon, closed above our heads, blackening the blue sky of American Freedom! Happy for us they did so!—Happy are we fellow-citizens, that the feelings of our then esteemed mother country toward America were insulting in the extreme, her conduct oppressive beyond example;—happy for us that the cloven foot of tyranny was thus early disclosed, before our interests, affections, and prejudices were more intimately entwined with those of our transatlantic brethren—before habit, education, and the example of our fathers had taught us to receive as a serious thing, that weakest and most absurd of all pretended obligations—allegiance to hereditary power!—before these shackles of the mind, growing with our growth, and strengthening with our strength, had become of sufficient magnitude to bow our necks to the yoke, they were burst asunder at the approach of more galling fetters;—had the assault upon our liberties been reserved for a later day, the strengthened influence of the mental bonds I have mentioned, might have prevented successful resistance.—What have I said? Fellow-citizens, I recall the sentiment! the spirit of Independence,

“Lord of the lion heart and eagle eye!”

was inherent in the bosoms of our fathers!—it walked with them in fellowship in the forest's shade—they held communion with it in the mountain breeze—

..

it was a boon from heaven! which knew no death, no restriction, save from the hand of its Creator!—handed down in its original purity from generation to generation, whenever human means had endeavoured to prison its free thoughts, it would have at once resolved itself on public action—

“ Its power resistless and its will command !”

What but the heaven-born confidence of exalted and virtuous minds could have supported the heroes of our revolution in the persevering pursuit of their immortalizing vocation?—what but *might of soul* could have prompted and sustained resistance to the matchless force which the enemies of American liberty arrayed against it? Look at the then existing state of our country! Our fathers feeling toward the people of Great Britain as toward children of the same parent—to the government bowing with dignified submission, as to the executive of the laws which controlled them, they raised their voices more in sorrow than in anger at the first approach of oppression. Yet still the fiend advanced! Fellow-citizens! these were stirring times! Inexperienced in the art of war, unprovided with munitions, unprepared with means, aware of the felon fate which awaited their lives, heart sick at the stigma which would attach itself to their characters in case of unsuccessful opposition, yet still the sacred fire of freedom burning on the anointed altar of every patriot heart, and every sword and soul obeying its inspiring summons to arms, our fathers, supported by that power which did not leave them nor forsake them, dared in the presence of majesty to wear the port of freemen, and waking the battle cry of liberty, flung forth her banners to the breeze of heaven! Scowling dark and fierce the tempest of a monarch’s vengeance came upon them! but as the cloud of the midnight storm gives added lustre to the

lightning's flash, so the darkness of oppression hovering over our land displayed the electric light of liberty's spirit throughout an awakened continent!

Then, indeed, like a band of brothers joined, our gallant fathers bared their bosoms to the storm! they knew not, they cared not what was their chance of success! they looked not abroad for succour! each patriot brought into the field a stout heart and a ready hand, and felt that his brother did the same—local restrictions and religious dissensions were remembered no more, swayed by one mind they arrayed themselves for conflict, they knew no alternative, they sought none! The demon of slavery had his foot on the threshold, he must be beaten back, or enter the sacred asylum of home, by trampling on the mangled corse of the husband and the father! With unexampled fidelity, patience, and perseverance they engaged in a seven years' war of unparalleled privation in defence of their rights! of our rights, fellow citizens! of the rights of millions, yet unborn! for us, for them, they fought, and bled, and died!—for posterity all their days of battle and their nights of danger were encountered! for the welfare of generations yet to come, they wandered from the heaven of their family firesides and parted from kindred and friends! they gave themselves a sacrifice that the patrimony of liberty and independence might descend to us and to our children for ever!—Fellow-citizens, lives their one who claims this land of the graves of such heroes for his birth place, who looking back upon the heroic deeds of the patriots and martyrs of our revolution, finds not his heart kindling within him at the contemplation of the beauty of virtue, and offering up on the shrine of gratitude and enthusiastic admiration each selfish thought, as a tribute to the devotion of our fathers in the cause of liberty and justice?—No! fellow-citizens, there can be none “with soul so dead” as

not to feel his "*bosom rise*" at the memory of such chastened heroism. Time with his eternal lips will tell to the latest ages of posterity the conduct of our ancestors; their example will live a star of glory in the west, shedding the light of wisdom and of virtue upon a contemplating world!

First in order as in character on the record of our country's emancipation stands the battle of Lexington!—The onset on the part of our enemies was a deed of foul oppression, in the true nature of tyranny unprovoked, unlooked for. Then burst forth the hitherto restrained impulse of liberty, never again to be enthralled!—Rushing to arms at the sound of the musket's crash, our brave countrymen needing no preparation but the seizure of a weapon, no exhortation to battle but the opportunity of fighting for their immunities, leaving their teams in the half furrowed field and casting aside the implements of husbandry, they hastened to the glorious conflict, where the watchword was liberty or death! There the untutored votarist of freedom and the accomplished minions of monarchy strove for ascendancy—the glorious result gave strength to the confidence, and certainty to the hopes of our fathers; and was their first illustration of that ennobling truth that on him whose mind is free the fetters of slavery can never be imposed! The physical force of combined creation cannot subjugate that people, who united in soul and sentiment, resolve

"To dig no laud for tyrants but their graves!"

Next on the list of aggression, followed the proclamation of rebellion, denouncing the bitterest vengeance of the British king against his American subjects, who acting from the dictation of those virtuous precepts, which heaven had implanted in their hearts, dared to peril their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honour, in the cause of right. Then came to pass the prophetic declaration of Chatham, offered in

vain to the British ministry, in his appeal for justice to America. “The very first drop of blood that is drawn, will make a wound never to be healed.” It did so! and our fathers resolved to know the hand that shed it, as that of a parent no more. And in obedience to the prompting spirit of wisdom and justice, on the fourth of July, seventeen hundred and seventy-six, they declared themselves a free, sovereign, and independent people! Then with renewed ardour, they pursued the defence of their rights, and enforced the declaration of their sentiments at the bayonet’s point—till at the battle of Yorktown, they destroyed the power which the enemies of American liberty possessed in our country. Near half a century has rolled away, and the nation to whom they gave political existence, still maintains the character which their virtues and heroism imparted!—The scion of liberty which they planted, has grown a parent tree, and the wearied and oppressed of all nations find rest and shelter beneath it. “It is a light and a landmark on the cliffs of fame,”

Where freedom’s banner to the globe unfurled,  
Beckons the free hearts of the boundless world!

How often, fellow-citizens, on the anniversary of this auspicious day, have we listened with delight and instruction to the rehearsal of the attributes of the “father of his country”—to the virtues, talents, and patriotism of him who was “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen”—the honoured agent of Almighty power—the observed of all observers—WASHINGTON! But the theme is as inexhaustive in its source as the unceasing flow of good, which every action of his public life, served to secure to his country for ever—

“ Age cannot wither it, nor custom stale,  
Its infinite variety.”

We seek in vain to enhance his glory by contrast-

ing him with the heros, patriots and sages of ancient times. History affords no parallel to the “peril and circumstance” of our revolution; and of the years immediately succeeding the acknowledgment of our Independence. She must pause in attempted panegyric, and rest satisfied with the emphatic declaration “he finished the work which was given him to do.”

Surveying all things with a quiet intelligence which spoke wise and irresistible resolution, and a mind capable of drawing speedy and correct conclusions, and of acting at once upon its determinations, no contingency was unprovided for, no advantage was suffered to pass unheeded. Throughout the varying history of our revolution, his heart was single to the welfare of his country, his eye ever watching over her for good. The confidence and affection of his countrymen, knew no change! the contemplation of his virtues was the cherisher of their hopes: they lost not sight of its influence until that glorious reality, their everlasting freedom, was secured.

Never lived the man whom his compatriots, and the world so delighted to honour! the chastened virtue, the benevolent goodness, the exalted integrity of his character, demanded and received justice and admiration from his enemies, and none are more truly aware of his greatness, than the nation from whose unhallowed designs, he protected his infant country. First in war, he led her armies to victory, or brought them with unparalleled ingenuity, from the unsuccessful field, to strike in the cause of liberty, on another and a better day; possessed of unequalled address, his wisdom ever acted the assistant to his bravery; and his abilities as a soldier, was a constant theme for admiration in the camp of his foes. First in peace, the exalted estimation of his countrymen in regard to his powers of mind, burst forth with enthusiastic delight, to proclaim him the first Chief

**Magistrate of the Union, after the adoption of the federal constitution.** Here again he had difficulties to overcome, and abilities to display, second only to those which brought his country out of bondage. But assured of his own integrity and firmness, and confiding in the blessing of heaven for its all wise direction, and assembling around him that patriotic phalanx, Jefferson, Hamilton, Knox, Randolph, Jay, he advanced to meet the threatening danger. His wisdom, and courage produced a result of unexampled success—our national concerns soon “floated on the full tide of successful experiment,” and respect abroad, quiet at home, prosperity and happiness flowed from the measures of his administration! First in the hearts of his countrymen, how shall we exemplify this truth? all expressive silence may best declare its existence;—“more eloquent than words” the bounding impulse of gratitude in every patriot bosom proclaims it; while the bowing of the heart, in meek and lowly reverence, at the contemplation of his virtues declares the divinity of his goodness; and the continued aspirations of a nation’s love, ask his reward from heaven.

Fellow-citizens, it becomes us to inquire, how far have we walked in the paths and precepts of the immortal patriots of our revolution? how far have we, in latter days, shown ourselves worthy of the glorious legacy, bequeathed us in their example?—let our devotion to the liberties of our country, and our maintenance of her rights declare!—In the late renewed struggle for the support of our immunities, the spirit of “seventy-six” was again enkindled in every American bosom; the pollution of the enemy’s footstep was washed with his blood from our soil,

“And Liberty walk’d like a God on the waves.”

**Emblazoned for ever on the records of fame, stand the names of Jackson, Brown, Scott, and Croghan:**

of Hull, Decatur, Jones, Brainbridge, Perry, Macdonough! and from the cherished grave, Pike, Covington, Lawrence, Ludlow, Burrows, and the remaining martyrs who have

“—— sunk to rest  
With all their country’s wishes blest,”

Speak in a voice more emphatic than the deep toned thunder. But the rude storm of war has passed away! the song of peace in our land, and the character of our country sails unblemished on the tide of Time.

Yet ever ready at the call of justice; ever actively attentive to the petitioning voice of suffering humanity; behold our countrymen going forth to battle in her cause, and braving death at the hands of the pirate miscreants who lately infested the West Indian seas,—behold, and give a tribute to the fate of Allen.

“The young, the beautiful, the brave,”  
who hastening to redress the wrongs of his fellows,  
fell a victim to his enthusiastic gallantry in the discharge of his duty.

“Pride of his country’s banded chivalry,”  
his character has been portrayed to us by a highly gifted, and distinguished bard of our own, in a strain which might have created the hero it sung! the couplet which should be inscribed to his memory, on every patriot heart, tells with all the eloquence of truth, the consistency of his virtue in life and death—

“He lived as mothers wish their sons to live,  
He died as fathers wish their sons to die!”

Turning aside from the contemplation of our beloved home of liberty and peace, we behold France in her first attempt to shake off the thraldom of “legitimate” slavery, looking not to the Giver of every good and perfect gift, but losing sight of the glorious attributes of freedom, which are justice and virtue, and giving herself up to all the unrestrained

licentiousness of which the human heart is capable ! We behold Napoleon Bonaparte, grasping the slackened reins of government, directing its course aright, and with the blessing of Divine Providence, bringing good out of evil—we behold him in his march of mind, changing,

“ As with the stroke of the enchanter’s wand,”

the political state of Europe, which had so long lain dormant with all its imperfections on its head—we behold him the worker of improvements, the author of human benefits over which the stagnant intellect of legitimate sovereigns had slumbered for ages, the meliorator of the condition of mankind. The crowned heads of Europe were, in consequence, combined against him, and the miscreant panders of their purposes, filled the world with misrepresentation and falsehood, in relation to his character. Blessed be heaven ! the radiance of truth has burst through the clouds and darkness with which envy, malice, and fear had overshadowed it, and man with the glorious light of knowledge beaming in his mind has become accountable before the judgment seat of God for the estimation in which he holds him !

No need, fellow-citizens, to review his character or to recount his deeds ; the history of his life and the motives of his actions are open before us ; but we will pause for a moment in the pleasing contemplation of the homage he has done to virtue, of the just and complimentary tribute he has paid to our national character, to his own discernment, and to the chastity of his ambition in his declaration that, had America been his sphere of action, he would have walked in the path and precepts of our Washington ! The existence of such a sentiment in the breast of Napoleon demands, and should receive from us, fellow-citizens, an acknowledgment and consideration surpassed only by that with which its practical illustration would have been ennobled !

Deceived by the exalted character of his own nature into a belief of the magnanimity of Great Britain, he surrendered himself her prisoner—she made him the prisoner of that tyrant junto, who like the arch enemy of mankind, assuming the appearance of an angel of light, have stolen an attribute of the deity and called themselves holy—the Holy Alliance! Yes!

“Like the baseless fabric of a vision”—

it was indeed a vision! the misplaced confidence of Napoleon in the justice of England melted into thin air: that nobility of soul, in whose existence he had implicit belief, because he felt a power within himself capable of executing its dictates, lived not where he sought it! Europe! the page of thy history is for ever defiled by the record that he acted from an exalted confidence in the magnanimity of his enemies, and died the victim of his error.

There, in a far distant isle of the ocean—at once his prison and his grave—alone and solitary as his greatness, Napoleon Bonaparte sleeps the sleep of death—the sacrifice to a policy on the part of Great Britain so mean, so contracted, that the insect soul of the merciless minion whom she employed to work her will upon him, embraced, it with avidity and ease, and had room and to spare for the conception of schemes of villany on his own account, private and pitiful as cowardice! While the blackness of a deed like this remains upon the escutcheon of England, her character no more shall

“Smile in the world’s approving eyes”—

It will be the detested contemplation of millions who look not yet upon the light—let her also look to it!

But Napoleon can never cease to be, though the malice of his enemies is more insatiate than the grave! his brilliant example blazing to the admiration of the world, makes him for ever himself in

influence and authority ! The never dying fact that his hand quenched the licentious flame of the revolutionary spirit of France, and awakened in its stead the genial light of liberty and justice, proves to the world that the overthrow of kings and of hereditary power may be effected without that rapine and bloodshed, and the destruction of every thing sacred and holy, which has hitherto in the estimation of virtuous minds made the remedy worse than the evil, and prevented the ennobling spirit of freedom from being nourished in many a righteous heart ! It is his demonstration of this truth which is the cause of the immortal hatred born to him and to his memory by the Holy Alliance and their worshippers. But thank Heaven, their hate is his earnest of the cherished memory in which ages yet to come will hold him !

France ! thy liberties—alas ! the hunters have them now !

“ Yet, Freedom ! yet thy banner, torn but flying,  
Streams like the thunder storm *against* the wind ;  
Thy trumpet voice, though broken now and dying,  
The loudest still the tempest leaves behind ?”

To Greece the spirit of her ancient days has paid an angel’s lingering visit. Let it dwell with her for ever!—and if the earth hold yet another seed like that which furnished forth the being of our Washington ; warmed by freedom’s sun and cherished by the dews which justice weeps upon the mangled rights of mankind,—let it grow in giant strength ! but if there live none such, oh ! let the grave send back some guardian spirits to lead their country in her struggle for liberty, a second time to glory’s pinnacle !—

“ Of the three hundred, grant but three,  
To make a new Thermopylæ !”

Behold ! fellow-citizens, now on the throne of France, placed there by the Holy Alliance. those

arch enemies of the rights of man, one who, in person and attribute, is the quintessence, of kingly legitimacy!—Behold his armies marching into a neighbouring territory in the insulting absence of a declaration of war, and proclaiming it as their purpose to restore the imagined rights of an individual to the destruction of a nation's immunities! Oh sacred freedom! implant thy spirit in the breast of every Spaniard! let their offering to thee be the extermination of their invaders! and may the echo of their battle-cry awaken the genius of renovation throughout the western hemisphere.

Let us, fellow-citizens, on this birth day of our independence, one and all, as a tribute to the memory of our fathers, resolve to live stedfast in their political faith, the fruit of which is the freedom and happiness of our country!—The primitive and pure spirit of republicanism is in strict accordance with the precepts of Christianity! The foundation of morality, the rock of justice, it creates the disposition which requires not of our fellows that which we will not bestow upon them—which does unto them as we would have them do unto us! This is the divinity we worship in the dictates of freedom! In the existence of such principles, slavery has no thought, oppression no hope, and man discards

“The will and power to make his fellow mourn.”

Brother firemen! for the first time as a body, have we on this day of our national jubilee, embraced the privilege we enjoy of publicly uniting in the expression of our sentiments and feelings as a free people! Next to the possession of virtue is the admiration of its excellence; so, next to the glory of being engaged in the rescue of our country, is our estimation of the deed! Therefore, we have done well in this first exhibition of the love and admiration which we bear to the workers of our independence,

and of our gratitude and pride as freemen. Let it not be the last! As citizens of this great republic, the preservation of our liberties, and the faithful discharge of our duty to ourselves, to each other, and to posterity, is an easy and a glorious task; effected by keeping inviolate the laws, and institutions, and governing principles which our fathers handed down to us! And how shall we accomplish this?—Preserve the fountain holy and its emanating streams will be undefiled! By bestowing the highest office in the gift of the people only on him whose education, precepts, and practice accord with those virtuous and just principles of republicanism which secured the blessing of heaven on our struggle for liberty, and of whose integrity and firmness in unchanging devotion to the best interests of his country, he even tenor of his political life, has given us the conviction of truth. In the language of the farewell address of Washington, “*the period for a new election of a citizen to administer the executive government of the United States is not far distant—and the time actually arrived when your thoughts must be employed in designating the person who is to be clothed with that important trust.*”

Fellow-citizens! these words of the legacy of the father of his country were not addressed to any sect or to any party, but to each individual member of the Union, of whom he was taking leave with the parting advice and blessing of a parent. It is a subject which comes home to “each man’s business and bosom,” and in the just regard we pay to it, each one becomes the champion of his own and his brother’s rights and liberties! In following the dictates of Washington we can never err;—he has taught us to frown indignantly upon him who would create sectional distinctions amongst us, to beware of that man who would attempt to enfeeble the sacred ties which now link together the various

parts of our confederacy;—let us cherish the advice as an admonition from heaven!—What is the relation in which an absolute monarch stands to his subjects? It is, that the exercise of imperative power supports the whims and interests of an individual in opposition to the equal rights of millions. Fellow-citizens! in as much as sectional feelings are allowed to predominate—in as much as the interests of one portion of the community are ensured protection at the expense of the others—so far do we attack the fundamental principles of freedom, the possession of equal rights—so far do we become fit subjects for the yoke of slavery!

It is our bounden duty to select as the supporter of the constitution, and the administration of its laws, a champion of equal rights—one in whose breast the spirit of freedom in its simplicity and holiness is inherent—one born and brought up in the school of Washington, Jefferson, and Madison:—not the intended supporter of sectional interests—not the avowed patron of the army and navy—not the exclusive friend of commerce, or of manufacturers, or of internal improvements and agriculture, but the firm, just, and moderate guardian and supporter of the well being of the whole so far as they are conducive to the welfare of the nation!

Fellow-citizens! insuring by our attention to the subject, the election of such an one, and scrupulously guarding against the introduction of foreign habits, manners, and views of things; and never losing sight of the dictates of common-sense in the imposing plausibility of etiquette, but relying upon the goodness of Divine Providence for a continuance of its blessings, let us live in the brilliant and virtuous hope that the blessed sun of liberty, whose primal beams have glorified our country, will, while yet in

its morning hour, awaken the universal family of mankind to a knowledge of their rights, and extend its heaven born influence over an emancipated world.

THE END

1877

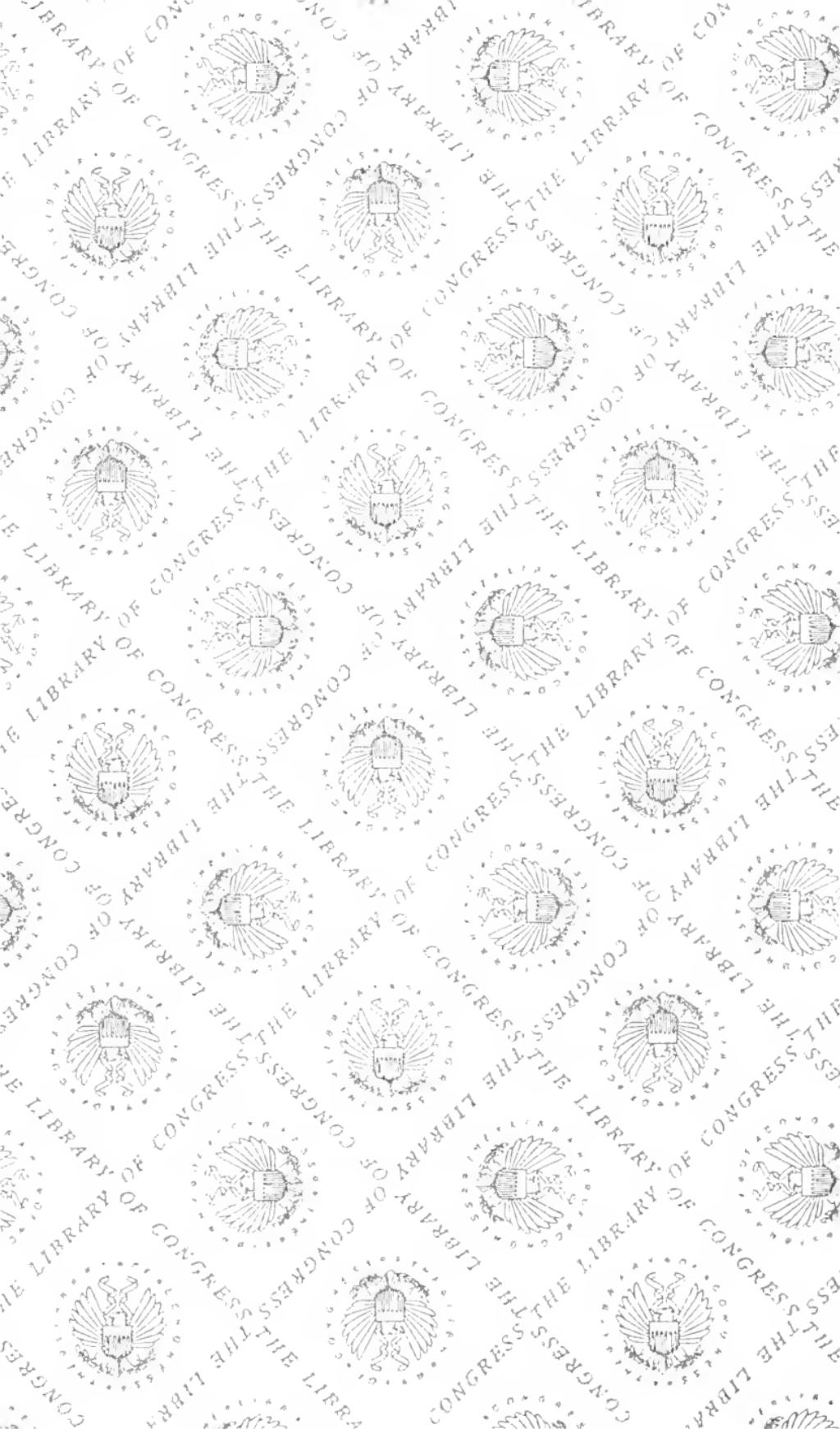












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